

(I'll bring thunder, I'll bring rain) and when I'm finished, they won't even know your name by ceruleanstorm

Series: (something strange in your neighborhood) [4]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Language: English

Characters: Eleven, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

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Summary:

Eleven continued to cry, never noticing Joyce kneeling down on the bathroom floor. “I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!” she was sobbing over and over, her knuckles white and her eyes shut. Joyce put a hand on her shoulder.

“Eleven?” The young woman only continued to sob, her shoulders hunched as she began to dry heave again. Joyce rubbed her back until she was done, brushing her beautiful brown curls out of the way. “El?” she tried again. But there was no response.

El had only just barely registered Joyce was with her. She hadn’t heard the door open or Joyce come in. An awful feeling of pain flooded through her body as Joyce kneeled beside her and the volume of her Papa’s words became deafening in her head, they won’t want you anymore, they won’t want you anymore. She tried to

breathe through the sobs, but could only get shallow air in until she was hyperventilating.

the night before her wedding, Eleven is still having nightmares about her life under Brenner. Joyce comes to her aid, knowing exactly what she is feeling.

(I'll bring thunder, I'll bring rain) and when I'm finished, they won't even know your name

Author's Note:

I LOVE KESHA. okay just thought I should get that out there before we start. I listen to her song Praying (if you haven't go do yourself a favor and youtube that masterpiece) and cry almost every time. There were some shitty people in my past, and this song captures exactly what it feels like to be abused and left to heal on your own. But you can do it.

Praying is one of Eleven's songs. I listened to it and knew I wanted to write something for her.

trigger warning for abuse and mentions of it.

"Sometimes, I pray for you at night

Someday, maybe you'll see the light

Some say, in life you're gonna get what you give

But some things only God can forgive."

El has a faint premonition she's dreaming, spinning in this lucid other world she only visits when she sleeps. Everything is either moving too fast, or too slow, her visions freezing for milliseconds then becoming faster as they attempt to catch up to the present, like a tape catching and then trying to find the right speed of a song. The landscape is familiar to her, the long endless cracked sidewalks of Hawkins, taking her nowhere, covered in black snow and rotting entropy all around. But it won't stay this way, it never does, she knows as she tosses and turns in her sheets, and the scene changes, melting into the familiar veins of Chicago covered in ghosts. She's following the crowds of people around her but doesn't know their destination. She just keeps walking among them, their voices hollow,

haunting sounds.

Someone is calling her name. Not her true name El, but not her old name Eleven. They're calling for Jane. "*That's me!*" El says out loud, turning around and in the empty silence her voice echoes.

"*Jane!*" someone calls again, their voice frantic. "*Jane! Jane! Jane!*"

She knows she has to get to them as she pulls at the long hair on her head, and fast. But why? El decides it doesn't matter as she makes a run down the street, following the voice that changes every time it calls out for her. "*I can help them!*" she yells and runs faster. There's this notion in her head that she's not getting any farther, the voice still as stranded in the distance as when she began. Diving through the crowd of faceless people, El wills her legs to go faster. They feel heavy, like she's walking in water instead of running. The voice calls for her again, voice bleeding with agony.

"*It's my mother!*" El tells herself. Not Joyce, but her real mother, Terry. She's sure of it. No one else calls her by her first name. Only the more El tries to reach her, the slower time around her becomes. She's calling her name, and El calls out for her, but her voice is lost somewhere in the infinite space between them.

In the real world, thunder shakes the window panel in her bedroom and El's knuckles are white from clutching the sheets.

"*Hello?*" she calls out and listens to the echo.

"*Jane!*"

El starts to run again, turning a corner of one of the many Chicago buildings into a dark alley. Her footsteps begin to echo and each step begins leaves her feet cold, because she's no longer running on asphalt. She's started running on tile. El glances up from her feet, and her breath stops in her lungs as she wildly spins around.

"*No!*" Her screams echo off the white walls. Her knees go weak and she reaches for the support of the porcelain tiles, a strangled cry escaping her when she looks down and sees the torn hospital gown she's now wearing. She claws at it like a panicked animal. "*This isn't*

real, this isn't real!" she screams, slamming her fists into the wall. "Wake up, El! Wake up!" She's sliding down the freezing wall, sobs escaping her, running shaky hands through her long hair.

There's a part of her that understands she's dreaming. That all this could be is a place in her head. El knows, she's certain even in the fog of her reverie that she's home safe in a warm bed, in her fleece pajamas. She's has life worth living, she has people who love her. And this, what she's created here, isn't real.

El lets out a scream that sends a shockwave through the empty hallway. The voice that was calling her has dissipated, failed once again by El, the only sound now her pained sobs. *This isn't real, this isn't real, this isn't real.*

But it looks real. It sounds real. It feels so real. The gown, the white walls, the emptiness of it all. It's like she never even left.

"*Eleven.*" Another voice calls out and ice runs through her veins. El is paralyzed where she stands, defenseless in the middle of a memory, as footsteps come toward her. He's yet to show himself. *Coward!* El wants to scream. *Come out and face me! We'll see who fails this time!* But it's like her mouth has been sewn together, and the words cannot escape.

"*Papa.*" She hears herself say.

"*You came back.*"

You came back. Those words belong to someone else, not to him.

"I knew you would come back. It was only a matter of a time, you see... because I know what is best for you."

I would never come back! You're a monster! You turned me into a monster! I hate you I hate you I hate you! But the words don't come. It's like she can't make herself speak them. Only her sobs echo off the walls and ceilings that kept her trapped for so many long years. So El runs. If she can't fight, she'll run as fast as she can, even if it's never fast enough.

"*You can't run Eleven. Come back here.*"

“No!” she screams, taking the corner of hallway. As El runs, doors around her begin to shut with a blast of air that throws her to other side of the hall, leaving her nowhere to go but forward. It’s pure adrenaline that’s powering her around each corner until she’s lost in a labyrinth of white walls. *It’s not real! It’s not real! It’s not-*

Her foot slips on the tile and she crashes to the floor. The impact pushes her forward and she realizes what the wall now in front of her means. A dead end. There’s nowhere left for her to run.

The tears are falling down her cheeks fast. At least she can’t hear Brenner, or see him. *Maybe*, she thinks, *maybe I’ve finally outrun him*. But deep down she knows that the truth is she can never outrun him. He will always be one step ahead of her.

El makes a move to stand, using the wall to steady her shaking legs. The lights around her begin to flash without pattern, a dizzying flicker that has her stomach souring. She looks up, only to see herself, staring back her in a mirror she isn’t sure was there before. She’s too stunned to scream as her hands come to her head. *It’s gone*. Her hair, before was long and falling past her shoulder blades, a dark shade of brunette and layered with curls, was now gone. The girl staring back at her has a shaved head. Just like that she’s twelve years old and helpless once again.

Falling back to the floor she cries, “*It’s gone! It’s gone!*”

Then, slow footsteps come up behind her. Brenner has caught up to her again. “*You can’t have hair Eleven. You can’t have anything that makes you like them. Because you aren’t like them. You’re different.*”

“*Shut the hell up, you fucking asshole!*” is all she wants to scream as she whirls around, but the words get caught in her throat.

“*Give it back!*” she hears herself yell, her hands tearing at the nothingness on her head. “*Give it back!*”

“*No, Eleven. You may not have it back. You never even earned it.*”

“*This isn’t real, this isn’t real, this isn’t real.*” El whispers, each word growing louder as she slams the cold ground with a fist. Pain

reverberates through her hand.

Brenner stands above her, his face cold and unmoving. His voice, his damn voice, after all these years how does she remember his voice so well? His mastered expression of nothing, his eyes regarding her with disappointment. *“They won’t want you now.”* he tells her and is answered by her repeated screams to shut up. *“They’ll make you leave. They’ll see you for what you really are, now that you don’t have your silly hair. They can’t love if you’re like that. He won’t love you anymore.”*

He won’t love me anymore... they won’t want me anymore... he won’t love me anymore.

Brenner’s words echo around her as she lets out one last scream.

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El bolts awake, her nose bleeding and her skin burning and wet with tears. In the dark, she sees her wedding gown hanging on her closet, waiting for tomorrow. But it’s just too much. All she can hear is *“he won’t love you anymore”* as she faces the white silhouette, illuminated by the lightning that floods her room. *“He won’t love you anymore.”* Her ears ring as she jumps out of bed, running out and the door and into the hallway. Brenner is still there in her mind, still looking down upon her with same disappointment and disapproval. *“They won’t want you now.”*

She barely makes it to the restroom on time.

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Joyce isn’t sure why she wakes up. One moment, she’s lost in sleep, the next her eyes are open, taking in the whole room as it’s lit up in white light by lightening, her snoring husband as loud as the following thunder. Maybe it’s the storm that has woken her up, Joyce thinks, rubbing the sleepiness out of her eyes.

“Shit!” Joyce bites her lip when she sees the rain outside. They were planning for the wedding to be outside, they’d picked this beautiful garden and park. So much time and work had gone into planning and into decorating that Joyce was surprised they’d finished on time. She

thought of the paper lanterns and fairy lights, blown away by the storm. “Well, so much for that.”

“So much for what?” Jim mumbles, slightly stirring.

“Nothing, uh, go back to sleep honey. I’m just worried about the ceremony.” Joyce tells him, putting on her slippers.

“Try not to worry too much.” he says, yawning. “It doesn’t matter if they get rained out, they would marry each other in our living room.”

Joyce sighs. “You’re right. But there goes the money...”

“You mean the *Wheeler’s* money?”

“Hop!” she nudges him and he laughs.

“You know I’m right.” he mumbles into his pillow. Joyce moves to get up off their bed, her mind wandering to the snacks she could sneak in the kitchen. She glances at the red numbers glaring from the alarm clock. 3:15 am. Sighing, Joyce stands. Still too early for coffee.

A bump outside their room makes Joyce jump. Jim is sitting up, fumbling around the night stand for a gun that isn’t there (it hasn’t been needed for a long time.) “What was that?”

“Calm down, Jim.” Joyce puts her hand on her husband shoulder. “That’s probably just Pete running around in the attic.” Pete was the name given to an rather persistent possum that had taken to the Byers-Hopper household last fall. He had been doing a good job of destroying the attic until Hopper had chased him out. Pete had lived in the shed, tormenting Jim constantly, until winter sent him back to the warmth and messiness of their attic.

“Pete’s *dead* , Joyce!” he yawned.

“You *killed* Pete?” she gasped, feigning shock. “You told me he just went back to the shed, you big liar!”

Jim shook his head. “No, he’s dead. And *no* , I didn’t kill him. Pete died of completely natural causes.” He started to lie back down, his back now to her.

“Sure, uh huh, whatever you say honey-” Another bump from outside their door stopped Joyce. *It’s probably Will.* He and Eleven were both sleeping here until after the wedding, and then Will would go back to New York, and Eleven would leave with Mike and go back to Chicago. Will could never sleep during storms. He was most likely rummaging around the kitchen for comfort food, and Joyce didn’t want him to be alone. “I’m going to check out that out.”

“Want me to come with?”

Joyce shook her head as she opened the bedroom door. “No, I think it’s just Will.”

Her husband’s response was a snore, and Joyce walked out of their bedroom with an eyeroll. She stepped into the living room, her slippers making a soft pattering noise. Just then a shock of lightning lit up the room before, and she jumped at the thunder. How was she sleeping through this before?

Joyce listened to the silence that followed, her hand wandering up the wall for the lightswitch. As she flicked on the light, the quiet sound of crying began to float through the living room. That’s when Joyce noticed the bathroom door open, light filtering through it. Her stomach dropped.

She opened the door with gentle strength. Before her, Eleven lay sprawled over the toilet, her hair a chaotic mess around her, dry heaving. Joyce sucked in a breath, hoping that this didn’t mean what she thought it meant. Mike and El loved each other and yes, they were committing to marriage, but they were still too young to be starting a family. They needed time, and Joyce knew that first hand.

Eleven continued to cry, never noticing Joyce kneeling down on the bathroom floor. “I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I *hate* you!” she was sobbing over and over, her knuckles white and her eyes shut. Joyce put a hand on her shoulder.

“Eleven?” The young woman only continued to sob, her shoulders hunched as she began to dry heave again. Joyce rubbed her back until she was done, brushing her beautiful brown curls out of the way. “El?” she tried again. But there was no response.

El had only just barely registered Joyce was with her. She hadn't heard the door open or Joyce come in. An awful feeling of pain flooded through her body as Joyce kneeled beside her and the volume of her Papa's words became deafening in her head, *they won't want you anymore, they won't want you anymore*. She tried to breathe through the sobs, but could only get shallow air in until she was hyperventilating.

"El, Eleven, try and take, try and take a deep breath, El-" Joyce was saying but all El heard was Brenner in her head, over and over and over like a broken record. "Eleven!" Joyce shouted, shaking her and pulling her away from the toilet.

Falling onto her knees, El chanced looking up at Joyce. Her warm brown eyes were deep with concern. The mother she never had. In her mind, she could hear Terry Ives screaming for her, to come save her from Brenner's torture. She hadn't made it in time, she never made it in time. The tears began to fall again, and El collapsed into Joyce's arms.

"Oh honey..." Joyce whispered, her gentle voice helping El to breathe easier, "What's wrong, why- why are you crying? Why are you in here?"

"It was gone." was all Eleven could get through her tears.

"What was gone, honey?" Joyce began to rock them back and forth, rubbing small circles on El's back.

"My- my- my hair." she sobbed into Joyce's shoulder.

A wave of confusion came over Joyce. Her hair was gone? But Joyce was brushing it out her face and off her back. "Your hair? Honey your hair is still here...Oh. Oh, sweetie... Did you have a bad dream?"

"He took it. He took it away from me. He took *everything* away from me." El spit through gritted teeth.

Horror spread through Joyce's body. "Was it Brenner?" she asked in a whisper, already knowing the answer. El nodded into her shoulder, her sobs crescendoing.

"He took my hair away from me," she cried, almost letting out a scream, her rage eating her until there was nothing left but this magnetic sadness. "And- and -and, you'll see."

Joyce brushed a curl from her face. "I'll see what?"

"That I'm a monster," El began to pull at her hair. Then, to Joyce's horror, El began to back away from her. "And then you won't want me anymore. And- and- and-" she choked, barely able to breathe.

"And what, honey?" Joyce crawled on the bathroom floor towards her surrogate daughter, willing her back into her arms.

El pulled away from her, hugging her knees as she let out a sob. "And Mike. Mike won't love me anymore! So you can just *leave* ! Leave now before you see what I really am!" The bathroom door flew open, and Joyce could feel herself being pushed back. She caught the door frame, slamming the door back open and coming right back toward Eleven.

"Oh no you don't missy! No more pushing me away!" El continued to cry, not looking at her. "You don't have to push any of us away because we're not going anywhere!" Joyce shouted the last part; later she would chastise herself for raising her voice, but El had a thick and stubborn skull, it was exactly what made her one of them. She was able to get arms back around her, Eleven falling into her again.

"Please don't leave me, please don't leave me." she muttered into Joyce's shoulder as she began to rock her back and forth.

"I'm not leaving." Joyce told her, stroking her hair. "I'm right here, honey. You're not..." a sigh then, "you're not a monster Eleven. With or without your hair."

El wiped her nose on the back of her hand, shuddering at herself for being such a gross crier. *You're not a monster, El! You saved me!*

Somehow the memory of his words only made her cry harder, the thought of losing him enough to almost enough to kill her.

"What about Mike?" El asked Joyce, her voice and hands still shaking.

Joyce let out a laugh that echoed off the bathroom tile. “Oh, Eleven, Mike does not give a damn whether or not you have hair. Remember when you were twelve?” El nodded before resting her head on Joyce’s shoulder. “The way I remember that kid had a giant crush on you. Whether he was going to admit it or not.”

El giggled, if only a little, and relief flooded through Joyce. “You mean so much to him, El, to *all* of us. You know that, don’t you? Isn’t that what tomorrow is all about? How much you are loved? None of us care what you look like.”

“I- I know” El hiccuped, wiping her tears. “But- the dream. It was so *real*, Joyce. It was like- it was like I never even left.” she admitted as her voice caught.

Joyce rubbed her back. “It’s okay honey. You’re here, you’re safe. You got away. You have us now, and you’ll always have Mike. Think about tomorrow.” Joyce says, brushing back the young woman’s curls from her face. “This storm will be gone, and you’ll get to wear your dress that we spent *hours* looking for!”

El’s face broke into a smile, and despite the tears, she begins to laugh. “Remember how we dragged Will with us?” Joyce asks, laughing herself.

“Yes,” El nods, “And he complained the whole time.”

“He’ll be there tomorrow, and you’re his favorite person ever. You’re the only person who ever really understood him, and what he went through. And he hasn’t shut up about being best man, even though your maid of honor has threatened to trip him on the aisle if he messes up.”

“Oh my God, Max...” El put her face in her hands. “Please tell me she didn’t-”

“She did.” Joyce finished for her, holding back laughter. “Max has been taking the maid of honor thing so seriously.”

“And yet my bridal shower was a complete disaster.” Eleven deadpanned, rolling her swollen eyes. Joyce is just happy that El’s

sobbs have stopped for the moment, and that the nightmare's hold on her is slowly loosening. "She was probably the person behind Dustin and Lucas crashing it."

Joyce let out a laugh, nodding. "Now those two are so protective of you. Will told me they threatened Mike if he tried to do anything to you. But they're also so excited for you, they've been planning tomorrow since, well—"

"Since we were fifteen." El is now smiling at the memory. "They've been saying that ever since we started going out. Mike was so embarrassed."

Giving her a gentle smile, Joyce nodded in agreement. "You have to know how much Mike loves you. He was so lost without you. And I know that he cares about you more than anything, because he's never stopped saying it *ever*. El you have your whole life ahead of you, Brenner- that evil man, he can't take anything you from you anymore."

"I know." is all El can say in the silence that hung between them. "But the nightmares, I- I have so many things to be happy about, Mike, my family, my friends, and it's been along time, and they just never stop. Everytime I think I've beaten Papa- Brenner, my nightmares bring him back. As long as I'm still having the nightmares then... then he still has power over me." El lowered her head until it was resting on her knees. The tears threatened their return, and El squeezed her eyes shut tight, her heart aching with every beat.

"No." Joyce shook her head, adamant to a fault. "He never has power over you. He lost that long ago. I remember having nightmares after Lonnie. It's just your head playing tricks on you, sweetie."

A sob came over Eleven. "Why did he do those things to me, Joyce?" she cried, her voice breaking. "Why did he take so many things away? And why do I still have to live with him in my head?" she was sobbing by then as thunder shook the house and Joyce took her in her arms.

"Oh honey, I don't know. He did those things because he was a bad man. He was greedy, and selfish, and cruel. You didn't deserve any of

it, but look at you now... You're so kind and strong and good hearted. You love with everything you have. I'm just sorry you never got the closure you needed." Joyce sighed, remembering the feeling of ice that spread through her when Jim told her that Martin Brenner and his army had been eaten by the monster. There would be no redemption for those terrible men. They had played God, and had gotten fully what they deserved. "I think- I think that's why you still have nightmares. He never had any consequences for what he did to you."

El continued to cry on Joyce's shoulders, but Joyce did nothing to stop her. Her thoughts wandered to the nights she spent in the same position, cursing her ex husband for his mind games and manipulations that left her burned and scarred.

In attempt to steady her shallow breathing, El counted to ten and thought of Mike. This hadn't been the first time El's nightmares had come as a shock to her system, making her physically sick. It scared Mike and she would see the familiar flash of anger in his eyes, but he just held her. Held her until the tears and the anxiety came to an end, whispering how much he loved her. They'd sit there in their pajamas as she sobbed, undeserving of the man holding her, and El knew deep down that as long as she had Mike, as long as she kept living for the people she loved and who loved her, then she beat Brenner. Mike would remind her of it too, reminding her that she was strong and that *she* had won and shown them all.

And now she was going to start the rest of her life with him, and Brenner, even in the nightmares where he controlled her actions and what happened to her, could do nothing to touch that.

Joyce held her for the next fifteen minutes. They didn't have to speak. The presence of another person, a person who she knew loved her, was enough to give her the strength to pick up the pieces and put herself back together. The storm raged on outside but inside El was calm.

"Thank you." El whispered to her surrogate mother. A surprised looked overtook Joyce's face.

"Of course honey. You don't have to thank me. This is what moms

do.” she told El, watching the smile that bloomed on the young woman’s face.

Suddenly there was a knock on the wooden doors, making the two of them jump. “Jesus, Jim! You scared us!” Joyce put her head in her hand as she spotted her husband standing above them.

“What’s going on in here?” he asked, his voice gentle and full of worry. “Is everything okay?” He knelt down to be in front of them, taking Joyce’s hand.

“We’ll be okay. Eleven had a nightmare, but I think she’s fine.” nodded Joyce, and El gave them a smile.

“You okay, kiddo?” Hopper asked her, squeezing her shoulder. “Do I need to check for monsters under your bed again?”

“That was one time!” El protested, laughing because she couldn’t help herself. “And I was fourteen!”

“Still, I-” He was interrupted by the noise of someone falling in the hallway and cursing loudly. Seconds later, a sleepy Will came bursting through the bathroom door, wildly waving a bat around. Oh, how Jonathan would be proud.

“Guys I think Pete’s back!” he shouted, panting. “I heard him- wait, are you okay El? What are you all doing in here anyways?”

El took a deep breath before she began to explain. “I had a nightmare and got sick again.”

“Oh.” Will sighed. “Brenner?”

She nodded and her brother’s face fell. “Well, do you think you’ll be okay for tomorrow? Because I think Max and Nancy would *literally murder me* if anything goes wrong tomorrow. I don’t know how, but somehow it’s gonna be my fault.”

“No Will.” El laughed. She looked around at the people who had so quickly become her family and she thought of the boy who had found her in the rain, who had accepted her and loved her with every molecule despite everything. “I’ll be ready for tomorrow.”

The next morning the storm would pass. El would wake up in her bedroom and stare in awe at her wedding dress, happiness settling inside her, before her bridal party would rush in and demand to help her get ready, and the end, she wouldn't believe how beautiful she looked and how her hair was so pretty. The storm wouldn't have blown the fairy lights and lanterns away, only soaked them, and El would stare at their beauty as Hopper walked her down the aisle, Karen and Joyce crying, even Dustin and Lucas trying not to shed a tear, while the love of her life stared at her, his gentle face looking at her as she was pure wonder. Together they would make promises to one another, to love and support each other always, in sickness and health, for better or worse, and then they would promise to be husband and wife. Mike would then kiss her and hold onto her all night, El still not understanding how she had become so lucky to have him.

But that was for tomorrow. For now she let Joyce lead her back to her bed, Hopper and Will left in the bathroom as Hopper was left to relay the tragic news that Pete the possum was dead.

"Will you be okay here?" Joyce asked her, brushing her hair, that was still very much there, back. "I can get you anything that you need."

"No, I'll be okay. Thank you though." El smiled and Joyce kissed her goodnight. As she floated off back into the lucid world of her dreams, El thought back. To her family that stayed up with her, to her friends who drove over crazy, to the way Mike smiled at her. All that would be hers beginning tomorrow.

All she had to do was make it until sunrise.

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"I'm proud of who I am, no more monsters I can breath again

And you said that I was done

But you were wrong, and now the best is yet to come..."

-Praying, Kesha

Author's Note:

@the stranger things writers guild. thank you for help! and thanks for being in the best group chat ever.

I love all of you!!!! Please tell me what you think, I would love to hear from you. Also, can you believe how close we are to season 2? somebody get me a paper bag.

see you next time ;)
savannah